



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Incidence of tooth decay is on the rise for two to five-year-olds** *“February is National Children’s Dental Health Month”*

**Eau Claire, WI – February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014-** Tooth decay is the most common chronic health problem affecting children in the U.S. It is five times more common than asthma. Tooth decay, if left untreated even in the earliest stages of life, can have a serious impact on a child’s health-- causing problems that often last into adulthood and affecting kids’ ability to sleep, speak, learn and grow into happy and healthy adults. The CDC reports that two to five-year-olds are the only age group in this country where the incidence of tooth decay is on the rise. According to the 2010 Burden of Oral Disease in Wisconsin, about 25 % of Wisconsin’s Head Start children ages three and four have untreated decay and 33% have had cavities and now have fillings. In Western Wisconsin, one-in-five 3<sup>rd</sup> graders have untreated dental decay.

National Children’s Dental Health Month is celebrated each February to raise awareness about the importance of oral health. “Developing good habits at a young age along with regular dental visits will help children to have lifelong healthy teeth and gums.” says Lieske Giese, Director/Health Officer of the Eau Claire City-County Health Department.

Tooth decay can develop any time after the first tooth comes in, starting around six months old, but good oral health habits should begin even earlier.

- **Children’s baby teeth need to be brushed.** Even before children get their first tooth, the mouth and gums should be wiped with a soft, damp cloth or infant toothbrush after feedings.
- **Infants should finish their naptime or bedtime bottle before going to bed.** Even milk contains sugars that can be harmful when left to bathe on a child’s teeth at naptime or overnight. This can result in tooth decay.
- **Children should visit the dentist.** The Wisconsin Dental Association recommends children to visit a dentist within six months of getting the first tooth—and no later than the first birthday.

For those infants at risk for decay, fluoride varnish topical applications can now be applied as early as when the first teeth erupt to help protect baby teeth. In 2012, a total of 535 children, 8-10 years of age, were surveyed for untreated decay, need for early or urgent dental care, and presence of dental sealants. Third graders living in areas with water fluoridation were 12-16% less likely to experience cavities, untreated decay and a need for early or urgent care than those living in areas without water fluoridation. The City of Eau Claire municipal water system contains the optimal level of fluoride, 0.7 parts per million, to ensure children and adults receive the best protection against tooth decay. To learn more about the current fluoride level in your water, contact your local water system.

For more information about children’s dental health, please visit <http://www.ada.org/>. To find a list of dentists that see children before the age of 1 for a dental visit, please visit Eau Claire Healthy Communities, visit and click on the Oral Health Promotion Action Team: [www.echealthycommunities.org](http://www.echealthycommunities.org).

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